

IN THE CLAIMS:

The text of all pending claims, (including withdrawn claims) is set forth below. Cancelled and not entered claims are indicated with claim number and status only. The claims as listed below show added text with underlining and deleted text with ~~strikethrough~~. The status of each claim is indicated with one of (original), (currently amended), (cancelled), (withdrawn), (new), (previously presented), or (not entered).

Please CANCEL claims 2, 10, 18 and 34 and AMEND claims 1, 9, 12, 13, 16, 17, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 33, 35, 36, 37, 38, 39 and 40 and in accordance with the following:

1. (CURRENTLY AMENDED) An information reference apparatus, comprising:
a reference information storage part storing predetermined reference information;
a reference range defining information storage part storing predetermined reference range defining information; ~~and~~
a reference range defining part referring to the reference range defining information stored for a user by said reference range defining information storage part and defining a range of the reference information stored by said reference information storage part, in which range the reference information is available for the user to refer to-; and
a contribution receiving part receiving a contribution from the user and storing the contribution in said reference information storage part.

2. (CANCELLED)

3. (ORIGINAL) The information reference apparatus as claimed in claim 1, further comprising:

an authenticating part allowing a user to refer to the reference information after an authentication of the user is normally finished.

4. (ORIGINAL) The information reference apparatus as claimed in claim 1, further comprising:

a search range defining part responsive to a search request from a user's apparatus for referring to the reference range defining information from said reference range defining information storage part, and thereby defining a range of the reference information, in which range the reference information is available for the search.

5. (ORIGINAL) The information reference apparatus as claimed in claim 1, further comprising:

an URL management part registering an URL for each user, and being responsive to an URL reference request sent from a user's apparatus via a communication network for returning to the apparatus, information of URL previously registered for the relevant user.

6. (ORIGINAL) The information reference apparatus as claimed in claim 1, wherein: each user is given an attribute, and a user who makes a contribution is allowed to define a range of users who are allowed to refer to information included in the contribution, by designating the attribute thus given to the users.

7. (ORIGINAL) The information reference apparatus as claimed in claim 1, further comprising a referred information managing part storing information for determining whether or not an item of the reference information has been already referred to by a specific user, and enabling said specific user to determine that the item of reference information has been already referred to by himself or herself with a use of the thus-stored information, upon receiving a reference request from the specific user.

8. (ORIGINAL) The information reference apparatus as claimed in claim 1, wherein: the reference range defining information comprises information designating, for each item of the reference information, a range of users who are allowed to refer thereto, a determination as to whether or not each item of the reference information is available for a particular user being made by determining whether or not an attribute set for the particular user is included in said range of users designated for said item of the reference information.

9. (CURRENTLY AMENDED) An information reference system, comprising:
a reference information storage part storing predetermined reference information;
a reference range defining information storage part storing predetermined reference range defining information; and
a reference range defining part referring to the reference range defining information stored for a user by said reference range defining information storage part and defining a range of the reference information stored by said reference information storage part, in which range the reference information is available for the user to refer to; and
a contribution receiving part receiving a contribution from the user and storing the contribution in said reference information storage part.

10. (CANCELLED)

11. (ORIGINAL) The information reference system as claimed in claim 9, further comprising:

an authenticating part allowing a user to refer to the reference information when an authentication for the user is normally finished.

12. (CURRENTLY AMENDED) The information reference system as claimed in claim 9, further comprising:

a search range defining part responsive to a search request from a user's apparatus for referring to the reference range defining information from said reference range defining information storage part, and thereby defining a range of the reference information₁ stored in the reference information storage part, in which range the reference information is available for the search.

13. (CURRENTLY AMENDED) The information reference system as claimed in claim 9, further comprising:

an URL management part registering an URL for each user₇ and being responsive to an URL reference request₁ sent from a user's apparatus via a communication network₁ for returning, to the user's apparatus, information of the URL previously registered for the user.

14. (ORIGINAL) The information reference system as claimed in claim 9, wherein:
each user is given an attribute, and a user who makes a contribution is allowed to define a range of users who are allowed to refer to information included in the contribution, by designating the attribute thus given to the users.

15. (ORIGINAL) The information reference system as claimed in claim 9, further comprising a referred information managing part storing information for determining whether or not an item of the reference information has been already referred to by a specific user, and enabling said specific user to determine that the item of reference information has been already referred to by himself or herself with a use of the thus-stored information, upon receiving a reference request from the specific user.

16. (CURRENTLY AMENDED) The information reference system as claimed in claim 9, wherein:

the reference range defining information comprises information designating, for each item of the reference information a range of users who are allowed to refer to said item of the reference information, a determination as to whether or not each item of the reference information is available to be referred to by a particular user being made by determining whether or not an attribute set for said particular user is included in said range of users thus designated for said item of the reference information.

17. (CURRENTLY AMENDED) An information reference program causing a computer to execute the steps of:

a) storing predetermined reference information in a reference information storage part;
b) storing predetermined reference range defining information in a reference defining information storage part; and
c) referring to the reference range defining information, stored for a user in said reference range defining information storage part, and defining a range of the reference information stored in said reference information storage part, in which range the reference information is available for the user to refer to; and
receiving a contribution from a user and storing the contribution in said reference information storage part.

18. (CANCELLED)

19. (CURRENTLY AMENDED) The information reference program as claimed in claim 17, further causing the computer to execute the step of:

d) allowing a user to refer to the reference information stored in the reference information storage part when an authentication for the user is normally finished.

20. (CURRENTLY AMENDED) The information reference program as claimed in claim 17, further causing the computer to execute the step of:

e) responsive to a search request from a user's apparatus, referring to the reference range defining information from said reference range defining information storage part, and thereby defining a range of the reference information stored in the reference information storage part, in which range the reference information is available for the search.

21. (CURRENTLY AMENDED) The information reference program claimed in claim 17, further causing the computer to execute ~~the step of~~:

d) registering an URL for each user, and being responsive to an URL reference request sent from a user's apparatus via a communication network for returning, to the user's apparatus, information of URL previously registered for the user.

22. (CURRENTLY AMENDED) The information reference program as claimed in claim 17, causing the computer to execute ~~the step of~~:

d) providing each user with an attribute, and allowing a user who makes a contribution to define a range of users who are allowed to refer to information included in the contribution, by designating the attribute thus given to the users.

23. (CURRENTLY AMENDED) The information reference program as claimed in claim 17, further causing the computer to execute ~~the step of~~:

d) storing information for determining whether or not an item of the reference information has been already referred to by a specific user, and enabling said specific user to determine that the item of reference information has been already referred to by himself or herself with a use of the thus-stored information, upon receiving a reference request from the specific user.

24. (CURRENTLY AMENDED) The information reference program as claimed in claim 17, further causing the computer to execute ~~the steps of~~:

d) creating the reference range defining information to comprise information designating, for each item of the reference information, a range of users who are allowed to refer to said item of the reference information, and making a determination as to whether or not each item of the reference information is available to be referred to by a particular user by determining whether or not an attribute set for said particular user is included in said range of users thus designated for said item of the reference information.

25. (ORIGINAL) A computer readable information storage medium storing therein the program claimed in claim 17.

26. (ORIGINAL) A computer readable information storage medium storing therein the program claimed in claim 18.

27. (ORIGINAL) A computer readable information storage medium storing therein the program claimed in claim 19.

28. (ORIGINAL) A computer readable information storage medium storing therein the program claimed in claim 20.

29. (ORIGINAL) A computer readable information storage medium storing therein the program claimed in claim 21.

30. (ORIGINAL) A computer readable information storage medium storing therein the program claimed in claim 22.

31. (ORIGINAL) A computer readable information storage medium storing therein the program claimed in claim 23.

32. (ORIGINAL) A computer readable information storage medium storing therein the program claimed in claim 24.

33. (CURRENTLY AMENDED) An information reference method, comprising the steps of:

a) storing predetermined reference information in a reference information storage part;

b) storing predetermined reference range defining information in a reference defining information storage part; and

c) referring to the reference range defining information stored for a user in said reference range defining information storage part and defining a range of the reference information stored in said reference information storage part, in which range the reference information is available for the user to refer to; and

receiving a contribution from a user and storing the contribution in said reference information storage part.

34. (CANCELLED)

35. (CURRENTLY AMENDED) The information reference method as claimed in claim 33, further comprising ~~the step of~~:

d) allowing a user to refer to the reference information stored in the reference information storage part when an authentication for the user is normally finished.

36. (CURRENTLY AMENDED) The information reference method as claimed in claim 33, further comprising ~~the step of~~:

d) responsive to a search request from a user's apparatus, referring to the reference range defining information from said reference range defining information storage part and thereby defining a range of the reference information stored in the reference information storage part, in which range the reference information is available for the search.

37. (CURRENTLY AMENDED) The information reference method as claimed in claim 33, further comprising ~~the step of~~:

d) registering an URL for each user, and being responsive to an URL reference request sent from a user's apparatus via a communication network for returning, to the user's apparatus, information of URL previously registered for the user.

38. (CURRENTLY AMENDED) The information reference method as claimed in claim 33, further comprising ~~the step of~~:

d) providing each user an attribute, and allowing a user who makes a contribution to define a range of users who are allowed to refer to information included in the contribution, by designating the attribute thus given to the users.

39. (CURRENTLY AMENDED) The information reference method as claimed in claim 33, further comprising ~~the step of~~:

d) storing information for determining whether or not an item of the reference information has been already referred to by a specific user, and enabling said specific user to determine that the item of reference information has been already referred to by himself or herself with a use of the thus-stored information, upon receiving a reference request from the specific user.

40. (CURRENTLY AMENDED) The information reference program as claimed in claim 34, further comprising ~~the step of~~:

d) creating the reference range defining information to comprise information designating for each item of the reference information a range of users who are allowed to refer to said item of the reference information, and making a determination as to whether or not each item of the reference information is available to be referred to by a particular user by determining whether or not an attribute set for said particular user is included in said range of users thus designated for said item of the reference information.